



Office of the Attorney General
State of Texas

DAN MORALES
ATTORNEY GENERAL

September 13, 1996

Ms. Celamaine Cunniff
Regional Attorney
Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services
P.O. Box 4300
Tyler, Texas 75712

OR96-1663

Dear Ms. Cunniff:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 100652.

The Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services (the "department") received an open records request for "the entire" records concerning an investigation of alleged child neglect and abuse. You claim that the requested information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.108 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claimed and have reviewed the documents at issue.

Section 261.201 of the Family Code provides that, except as otherwise provided by that section, the files, reports, records, communications, and working papers used or developed in an investigation under chapter 261 or in providing services as a result of an investigation are confidential and not subject to release under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Fam. Code § 261.201(a)(2). Subsection (f) of section 261.201 provides:

(f) Notwithstanding Subsection (b), the department, on request and subject to department rule, shall provide to the parent, managing conservator, or other legal representative of a child who is the subject of reported abuse or neglect information concerning the reported abuse or neglect that would otherwise be confidential under this section if the department has edited the information to protect the confidentiality of the identity of the person who made the report

and any other person whose life or safety may be endangered by the disclosure.

Subsection (b), which is not applicable here, describes the conditions when a court may order the disclosure of information made confidential by subsection (a). Subsection (f) appears to require the department to provide certain parties, including a parent of a child who is the subject of a child abuse investigation, the information made confidential by subsection (a), with certain redactions. As the requestor here is the parent of the children involved in the investigation, we must consider whether the department must release the requested information to the requestor pursuant to subsection (f). However, because the department's release of the information pursuant to subsection (f) is "subject to department rule," we must first consider whether the department's rules provide for the disclosure of the requested information to the requestor.

Section 700.102 of title 40 of the Texas Administrative Code states that:

Information about a child protective services client is confidential and may not be released except as authorized by statute, federal regulation, court direction, attorney general's opinion, and the [department's] rules concerning disclosure of information and confidentiality of information in Chapter 734 of this title (relating to Public Information).

Section 700.102 directs us to consider other department rules concerning the disclosure of client information. Section 700.103 of title 40 of the Texas Administrative Code provides:

A child protective services client may review all information in the client's case record except the identity of the complainant, *information exempted from disclosure under the Open Records Act*, and information exempted under other state laws.

40 T.A.C. § 700.103 (emphasis added). This rule permits a "client" to review that client's case record, with the exception of the complainant's identity. *See also* 31 T.A.C. § 734.11(c) (permitting client review of case record information, with certain exceptions). We assume that the requestor, a parent of the alleged victims, is a client for purposes of section 700.103. However, even if the department considers the requestor a client under the circumstances, the regulation makes an exception to a client's right to review information in the client's case record for information "exempted from disclosure under the Open Records Act." We now proceed to consider whether the information is exempted from disclosure under the Open Records Act.

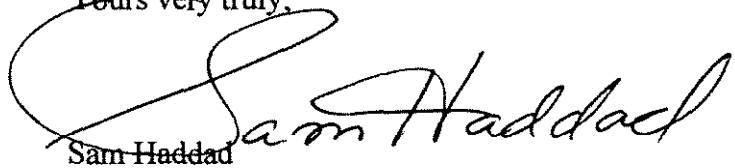
Section 552.108 excepts from disclosure "[i]nformation held by a law enforcement agency or prosecutor that deals with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime," and "[a]n internal record or notation of a law enforcement agency

or prosecutor that is maintained for internal use in matters relating to law enforcement or prosecution.” Gov’t Code § 552.108; *see Holmes v. Morales*, 924 S.W.2d 920 (Tex. 1996).

Here, the requestor is a parent of the children who are the subjects of the investigation about which the information is sought. You have provided us with a letter from an Assistant District Attorney for Bowie County, which states that the case “is currently under official investigation and currently pending criminal prosecution by [the District Attorney’s] office.” The letter also states that the release of the requested records could “hinder the investigation and prosecution of th[e] case.” This office has previously held that any proper custodian of records can claim the section 552.108 exception while an incident involving allegedly criminal conduct is still under investigation. Open Records Decision Nos. 474 (1987), 372 (1983). Accordingly, you may withhold the requested information under section 552.108 of the Government Code.¹

We are resolving this matter with an informal letter ruling rather than with a published open records decision. This ruling is limited to the particular records at issue under the facts presented to us in this request and should not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other records. If you have questions about this ruling, please contact our office.

Yours very truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sam Haddad". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the beginning.

Sam Haddad
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

SH/ch

Ref.: ID# 100652

Enclosures: Submitted documents

¹We note that there may be a conflict between the provisions of section 261.201(f) and the department’s current regulations, as section 261.201(f) appears to be a parental access provision while the department’s regulations permit the department to withhold information from the parent. We are confident that this apparent conflict will soon be resolved by the department’s enactment of new regulations.